



# Regional Education Service Centers

In 2003, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 929, subjecting the state's 20 Regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) to review and abolishment under the Sunset Act. To assist the Sunset Commission in its review, the Legislature required what is now the Legislative Budget Board's (LBB) School Performance Review division to contract with a consultant for a comprehensive audit of ESCs, and report the results of the review to the Sunset Commission. The legislation established specific audit criteria for the review of the ESCs, shown in the textbox *Education Service Centers*, to help determine the following:

- whether any services provided by an ESC could be provided at a lower cost by an alternative service provider;
- whether state appropriations to ESCs are adequate and should continue to be made;
- whether a separate system of Texas Education Agency (TEA) field offices would be appropriate or whether any functions should be transferred to TEA; and
- whether support requirements to school districts could be decreased through business processes or application redesigns.

<p><i>Education Service Centers</i> Audit Criteria</p> <p>Senate Bill 929 required a detailed analysis and review of ESCs based on the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all services provided, including the percentage of school districts using the service and the cost of providing the service;</li> <li>• support functions to school districts;</li> <li>• financial condition and funding sources;</li> <li>• governance structures; and</li> <li>• the number and geographic distribution of ESCs.</li> </ul>
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LBB contracted with MGT of America, Inc. (MGT) to perform the performance audit of the 20 ESCs. MGT and LBB completed the performance audit of the Education Service Centers in December and reported their findings and recommendations to the Sunset Commission. The three-volume performance audit can be accessed online at [www.lbb.state.tx.us/TSPRP/PublicEd\\_Documents.htm](http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/TSPRP/PublicEd_Documents.htm). The Sunset Commission directed Sunset Staff to forward the LBB/MGT recommendations to the Senate Education and House Public Education Committees for their consideration, and adopted the following recommendations.

## Recommendations

1. Continue the Education Service Centers by Repealing the Sunset Review Clause.
2. Direct the Commissioner of Education, by Rule, to Require ESC Board of Directors Training.

## **Issue 1**

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### **Texas Has A Continuing Need for the Regional Education Service Centers.**

The 20 Regional Education Service Centers play an integral role in the State public education system. ESCs assist Texas school districts and charter schools, as well as TEA, by providing training, technical assistance, administrative support, and other collaborative services aimed at strengthening educational programs and improving student performance. ESCs design their products and services to meet the needs of local school districts, charter schools, teachers, and administrators in each region of the state. Additionally, ESCs enable school districts to operate more efficiently and economically by offering services that many small districts would be unable to afford individually, including cooperative purchasing and technology support.

#### **Recommendation**

##### **Change in Statute**

##### **1.1 Continue the Regional Education Service Centers.**

This recommendation would continue the Regional Education Service Centers by repealing the Sunset review clause. The Sunset Commission would evaluate ESCs as part of the next Sunset review of TEA.

## **Issue 2**

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### **ESC Boards of Directors Do Not Receive Board Member Training.**

A seven-member board of directors governs each of the 20 Regional Education Service Centers. The local school district board of trustees in each education service center region elects the board of directors to a three-year term. Additionally, if at least one open-enrollment charter school is located in an education service center region, the Commissioner of Education appoints a representative of the open-enrollment charter schools in that region to serve as a non-voting member for a one-year term. The boards develop policies regarding center management and operation, programs and services to be offered, and financial support.

Although most school district board members must be involved in board development or other related forms of training, no such training is required of ESC board members. Without adequate information and training, some members may not be able to properly perform their duties.

#### **Recommendation**

##### **Change in Statute**

##### **2.1 Direct the Commissioner of Education, by rule, to require ESC board of directors training.**

This recommendation would require ESC boards of directors to receive board member training. Under this recommendation, TEA would develop a standard curriculum that provides ESC board members with training necessary to effectively handle the duties of their position. For example, the training curriculum could cover the Texas Education Code, Commissioner's rules, updates on state

and federal legislation and rules, board roles and functions, and ESC statewide and regional strategic planning. The statute would direct the Commissioner to require all ESC board members to receive this training within a specified time period after appointment. The training should be similar to training provided to school district board members.

## **Fiscal Implication Summary**

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These recommendations would have no fiscal impact to the State.

